The Men's Circle

Robin

The Rocky Mountain Men's Group has put in a good deal of time the past two or three months working on a Manhood Ritual for initiating young males into adulthood. We still don't have a complete ritual that we are all satisfied with, but a good start has been made. Some of the approaches taken in creating this kind of ritual have drawn upon traditional tribal rites of passage. Some of these tribal manhood rituals include taking the young candidate abruptly away from his family to an isolated spot, where he must remain for a long period of time, usually blindfolded and bound in the dark. Part of the ritual may involve physical pain such as tattooing, circumcision or ceremonial infliction of cuts that leave characteristic scars. Even leaving out the physical cutting, these rites deliberately put the young candidate through frightening, isolating and painful experiences.

No one has seriously proposed any ritual that leaves permanent scars on the candidate's body, but even so some feel that putting an innocent youngster through a traumatic experience is insensitive. It seems to me that this attitude misses the point. It is not a lack of compassion that is being expressed. There is no single word for it in English, it is a willingness to inflict (or at least allow) pain in order to teach a necessary lesson that cannot be conveyed in any other way. As sensitivity is usually considered a light feminine quality, so this complement is a dark masculine quality.

Is this dark masculine quality desirable - or even ethical? I think it is. There are elements of it in the Wiccan Initiation Rituals and the symbolism of the Scourge. It partially explains some of the Legend of the Descent of the Goddess into the Underworld - where the Goddess only learns to love the God after being scourged by Him. "Remember this - that you must suffer in order to learn". Although many people are put off by the dark quality of this particular attribute of the Masculine, it is important to remember that although not pretty, it is necessary. Perhaps the following story will illustrate this point.

A boy around eight or nine years old once found a very large caterpillar. It was dark green, as long and thick as a man's finger, and decorated with curious stalky and warty protuberances in blue, red, and bright yellow. Since it was nearly the end of summer, he took it home and put it in a large open jar, and kept it supplied with leaves of the type he had seen it eating.

After a couple of months it began to spin a cocoon about itself. He watched this with fascination, and when the cocoon was complete, he put the jar on a shelf of his screened back porch, where it remained through the winter.

When the days began to lengthen and the weather grew warmer he checked the jar every morning and afternoon, waiting for a little miracle of rebirth.

One Saturday morning his patience was rewarded. There was movement within the cocoon and a small hole had appeared. The boy watched in fascination as the hole became larger and the reborn creature inside struggled to emerge. The struggle went on for what seemed to the boy a long time and he began to feel sorry for the trapped insect.

Out of compassion, he ran off and returned with a pair of his mother's smallest, finest, scissors. Carefully he enlarged the hole, and then stood back to watch a beautifully patterned moth emerge into the light of day. The moth spread its folded wings, moving them gently to dry in the air. Their tan- and-gray markings seemed to the boy to be one of the most beautiful things he had ever seen.

When the moth's wings seemed dry, he carefully held the jar to the outside of the porch screen so that it could crawl out. He planned to watch it until it flew away to find a mate. The moth crawled onto the screen and perched there. It flapped its wings from time to time but did not fly.

When evening came, several male moths came and fluttered about the female clinging to the screen, but although she seemed to be trying to fly off and join them, she never moved from where she was. She stayed where she was for three or four days, and finally died and fell to the ground.

The boy later learned that the struggle to emerge from the cocoon is so prolonged for moths and butterflies because the long effort serves to pump necessary fluids into their wings and strengthen them for flight. By shortening this process, to spare the moth pain, he had prevented her wings from fully developing and so she could never fly and mate and lay the eggs of the next generation.

Robin
from RMPJ Oct. '86

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